

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### SCHIP VETO

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, as I have traveled around Rhode Island, I have met so many families who worry about health care. Will their child fall ill? Will the price of prescription drugs or a visit to the doctor go up again?

As health care costs skyrocket and the number of uninsured Americans approaches a staggering 50 million, we have a solemn obligation to make health care more accessible and affordable.

This obligation is not new. For decades, our Government has treated it as one of the most sacred promises we keep with the American people, and it has been one of our best opportunities to just plain do the right thing. Initiatives such as Medicare and Medicaid are among our greatest accomplishments. The Children's Health Insurance Program is a shining light in the American health care system, providing health coverage to millions of American children whose families could not otherwise afford insurance.

Since its creation in 1997, the Children's Health Insurance Program has given children in America's working families better access to medical care for common conditions such as asthma or ear infections, better school attendance rates, better academic achievement, better medical access, and more preventive care. It means that children stay out of expensive urgent care settings such as the emergency room. The Children's Health Insurance Program is among the singular health care success stories of our generation. That is why it has long enjoyed bipartisan support, including enthusiastic support from Republican Governors.

My State of Rhode Island has played a vital role in creating and sustaining the Children's Health Insurance Program. The distinguished Republican Senator John Chafee, whom so many of my colleagues will remember, was one of the early bipartisan architects of this bill. For years, my senior Senator, JACK REED, has been one of the most powerful advocates for this program in the Senate. I am proud to add my voice of support to his.

I am proud also to represent a State with one of the lowest rates of uninsured children and adults in the Nation. Rhode Island has worked for 15 years to achieve this success, beginning with Gov. Bruce Sundlun's establishment of the original RiteCare program in 1993. I was honored to have been part of Governor Sundlun's team.

Similar to many State programs, RiteCare relies on this funding that the President vetoed—relies on it to help families pay for regular checkups, immunizations, prescriptions, nutri-

tion and other services and to reduce the number of uninsured children in our State.

This year, leaders on both sides of the aisle came together in the Senate to make this strong, vital program even stronger. The \$35 billion agreement Congress passed last week would have brought health care to 10 million American children over the next 5 years, including adding up to 6,600 currently uninsured children in Rhode Island. We improved the program in other ways as well, adding quality dental and mental health care for children and new incentives for States to enroll more eligible children and to improve the quality of care.

But President Bush took all that away with the stroke of his veto pen. Why? Health insurance, he says, should be delivered in the private market. Well, guess what, Mr. President. The majority of children's health beneficiaries receive their coverage through private health plans. In fact, in 2005, all but two separate State children's health programs used a managed care company to provide CHIP benefits. The children's health plan does not threaten privatized health care; it is privatized health care for almost two-thirds of its enrollees. In Rhode Island, the Children's Health Insurance Program is delivered entirely through private insurers. As I have displayed here, the children's health program looks a lot like the health insurance the President has and the Senate has, and it doesn't look anything like the socialized medicine Republican opponents of this program have used as a red herring.

By the way, as a footnote on the public versus private health insurance question, maybe President Bush, who claims to be a fiscal conservative, would be pleased to learn that the small group of children's health beneficiaries who actually are in public insurance programs, cost the Government less than those who are on private insurance. In fact, publicly insured children cost taxpayers 10 percent less than privately insured children, and publicly insured adults cost 30 percent less than privately insured adults.

But the President is not persuaded by these facts. It does not matter to him that publicly insured children have a much better chance of having a well child care visit than uninsured children and a much better chance of having a dental care visit. It does not matter that practical Republican Governors across the country support this bill or that it is one of the most bipartisan achievements of this Congress. All that seems to matter to this President is ideology, and in this case, it is a bizarre ideology that doesn't think struggling, working-class families should have health care. In fact, he especially doesn't believe that struggling, working-class parents should have health care. He threatened to veto this bill based on that feature alone.

As recently as last summer at a Finance Committee hearing, his own CMS Administrator, Mark McClellan, stated—and this is a quote from the Bush administration:

Extending coverage to parents and caretaker relatives—

Parents and caretaker relatives—not only serves to cover additional insured individuals, but may also increase the likelihood that they will take the steps necessary to enroll their children. Extending coverage to parents and caretakers may also increase the likelihood that their children remain enrolled in CHIP.

Here is a copy of a letter that Administrator McClellan wrote to my home State of Rhode Island on January 13, 2006. It reads:

We are pleased to inform you that your amendment to the RiteCare section 1115 demonstration, as modified by the special terms and conditions accompanying this award, has been approved.

It also notes that Rhode Island's request to renew its demonstration project has also been approved.

And what exactly did Mark McClellan approve? Here is the next quote:

Expenditures for expanded SCHIP eligibility to individuals who, at the time of initial application, are custodial parents or relative caretakers of children eligible under the plan.

Signed Dr. Mark McClellan.

The Bush administration approved the program in Rhode Island for custodial parents and relative caretakers. Yet the President is shocked—shocked—that this program may cover some adults.

President Bush, you authorized the coverage for these adults over and over, State by State, through your Cabinet Secretary overseeing this problem. Your argument, sir, is with yourself.

All I can say is you were right the first time, before you took this shameful ideological U-turn.

Setting aside reason, setting aside the security and peace of mind of countless working-class families, driven by ideology, President Bush lifted his veto pen for only the fourth time in his Presidency and struck down the Children's Health Insurance Program. His reason this week: Because it costs too much.

In other words, the same administration that in 1 year, in 2008, will spend \$70 billion to pay for the Bush tax cuts for the top 1 percent of income earners, thinks it is too much to spend half that much over 5 years to provide billions of American children affordable health care. Said another way, the annual cost of Bush tax cuts for the superrich is 10 times the annual cost of this bill for children's health care, and he says he vetoes it over its cost.

The same administration is spending more than \$10 billion each month in Iraq, with no plan for ending the war and bringing our troops home, an administration that is now asking for 200 billion more dollars for the war this coming year, refuses to spend \$35 billion over the next 5 years to provide

millions of children all over this country affordable health care.

Instead, the President sought a funding level that would result in 1 million American children losing—losing—their health insurance.

So where would their families go to get these children health care if they don't have access to this insurance under the President's proposal? Well, before an audience in Cleveland on July 10, the President of the United States revealed his approach:

People have access to health care in America—

He said.

After all, you just go to an emergency room.

So that is it.

Tax cuts for billionaires that explode our national debt and leave future generations on the hook to pay for it—that is a big priority for President Bush. Billions for Blackwater, for an endless war with no plan to end it, for no-bid contracts for Halliburton—that is a big priority for President Bush.

But health care for children and their struggling working-class families, all paid for in the budget after hard-working bipartisan compromise? Nope. That is not a priority. That is a veto.

And the kids? "Send them to the emergency room," he says.

I am ashamed of the President's decision. His veto was unnecessary. It was wrong. It is now up to Congress to make it right. I ask my colleagues to override the President's veto of children's health insurance.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I wish to commend the Senator from Rhode Island for voicing his concerns about the veto of the children's health bill that is so important to so many children, and I appreciate his strong statement.

I think yesterday was a sad day for all Americans. For reasons I can't comprehend, President Bush yesterday decided to veto our bipartisan effort to invest in health care for the Nation's children. With no fanfare, behind closed doors, when no one was looking, the President put his personal politics ahead of increased investment in our most precious asset, our children.

I was so proud last week when, with bipartisan support in good margins in both Houses of Congress, we passed the Children's Health Insurance Program. That bill is an example of how Government ought to work.

Leaders in the House and in the Senate, both Republicans and Democrats, worked together to find a compromise that could work for everyone at the

table. Nobody got everything they wanted, but the final product was worthy of support and pride on all sides.

I had hoped that after seeing the tremendous work that went into this compromise the President would think of the kids in every State of the Union who needed basic health care and reconsider his position.

I had hoped he would think about the families who are struggling to make ends meet and reconsider his position.

I had hoped that in the end he would reconsider his plan to say no to our children and to our families. But yesterday those hopes were dashed.

All children should be able to see a doctor when they are sick, and all children should be able to get the medicine they need to make them better. When a child gets a cut that requires stitches or comes down with a fever or an earache or with any other imaginable problem, they ought to be able to get help, period.

Unfortunately, as we all know, today in America—the richest and most successful country ever—that is not the case. In fact, millions of American children do not have health insurance, which means millions of American kids cannot see a doctor when they are sick, and millions of American children don't get the medicine they need to help them get better.

It doesn't matter if you are a Republican or a Democrat, whether you are a progressive or conservative, I believe making sure our children get health care is the moral thing to do.

This veto that the President penned yesterday has real and serious impact on many families in my State and across the country. Because President Bush vetoed that bill, 3.8 million uninsured children are going to continue to live without coverage. Let me say that again. President Bush told 3.8 million children in America they cannot have health care. To me, that is just shameful.

When I came to the floor a couple of weeks ago to talk about this important bill, I told the story of a woman in my State, Sydney DeBord, who lives in Yakima, WA. She is a young girl who has cystic fibrosis. Her mom wrote to me to tell me how important this children's health insurance program was to her family. She said it allowed her daughter, Sydney, to get and extend her life, and it allowed her to live her very tough life to the fullest. I want to quote again from that letter because I believe she speaks for those more than 3 million children and their families on this dark day.

Ms. DeBord said:

I know for a fact that without this bit of assistance her life would end much sooner due to the inability to afford quality health care for her. As her parent, it frightens me to even think some day she may be without health care coverage if programs like CHIP are no longer available.

Today, I share Ms. DeBord's fears, and all other parents do as well.

We have another chance. The President doesn't have the final say on this

one. Right now, Members of the House of Representatives are working to find the votes to override this veto, perhaps, and hopefully end the fears of Ms. DeBord and millions of moms just like her. They need a few more votes. If they get a few more votes, we can tell the President that investing in families and investing in America is a priority of the men and women of this Congress no matter how many vetoes he sends our way.

It is very troubling to me that the President continues to ignore the wishes of the American public. The American people and the vast majority of Congress want to expand stem cell research to find cures for diseases affecting so many in our Nation. The President says no.

The American people and the vast majority of Congress want to change course in Iraq and bring our troops home safely. The President says no.

The American people and the vast majority of Congress want investment in roads, bridges, medical research, and education. The President says no.

The American people and the vast majority of Congress want to provide health care for our young children today. The President says no.

So we need a few more Republicans to join us and to join the American people in telling the President he is wrong and he cannot stand in the way of progress for our young kids. I hope the disappointment felt by kids and their families today is going to be washed away in the weeks to come by another bipartisan show of support for this outstanding and critical health care program in America.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### SENATOR DOMENICI'S RETIREMENT

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, we have all seen the news that our friend and colleague, PETE DOMENICI, is planning to announce today that he will retire from the Senate at the conclusion of his term. Senator DOMENICI called me yesterday afternoon to tell me of this decision. My reaction was one of surprise first, and then that gave way to admiration and appreciation for this man's decision to conclude his distinguished career of public service on his own terms.

He and his wife Nancy are traveling to Albuquerque this morning for the announcement this afternoon. This is a great gesture to the people of New Mexico, and in New Mexico the Domenicis will be greeted with the affection and respect which they richly deserve.